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February 10, 2000

TESTIMONY OF BILL SEDIVY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR IDAHO RIVERS UNITED

To the Army Corps:

On behalf of the Idaho Rivers United membership, thank you for accepting this testimony on recovery options outlined in the "All-H" and on the Snake River Juvenile Salmon EIS.

My comments here will focus on the recovery of the Snake River Basin species, all of which are listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. These fish are of primary concern to the residents of Idaho and the 1,800 members of my group.

We are here today because, in the late-1950s, the U.S. government and the people of this region made a grave mistake. Despite warnings from sportsmen and scientists, despite the concerns of Columbia Basin Indian tribes, leaders of the time chose to proceed with construction of four dams on the Lower Snake River.

Today, the error of that decision is clear. Since Lower Granite Dam was completed in 1975:

- Every species of Snake River salmon and steelhead has been listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. Snake River coho are extinct.
- Annual returns of salmon to Idaho have dropped from over 100,000 per year to about 10,000 per year.
- There hasn't been a general salmon fishing season in Idaho since 1978.
- Snake River sockeye, which once returned to spawning grounds in the Sawtooth Mountains by the thousands, have been reduced to a couple of broodstock populations managed by hatchery scientists — CPR for a species.

The evidence is clear. Time is running out.

But we still have a chance to save these magnificent Snake River salmon runs. With bold action, we can restore salmon and steelhead to the Snake, Salmon and Clearwater rivers.

On the issue of restoration, the science is clear — removing the four lower Snake River dams and restoring a more natural river is our best and perhaps only option. Two hundred-six scientists who wrote President Clinton last March know it. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service knows it. The Army Corps and NMFS know it. And deep down I suspect, the opponents of dam removal know it.

But if you're not convinced, all you need to do is look downstream. Salmon can survive four dams — look at the Hanford, Yakima and John Day stocks. But they can't survive eight.

Unfortunately, saving salmon and steelhead is not as simple as taking out the dams. The science of saving salmon is muddled by human and economic factors.

- Farmers of the Lewiston area and Eastern Washington are afraid that they'll lose access to markets if the dams are removed.
- Irrigators near Pasco are afraid they'll lose access to water.
- Industrial shippers, like Potlatch Corp., are afraid that the loss of barge transport will affect their ability to compete.
- People in Lewiston and Clarkston are afraid they'll lose their jobs.

Of course, these are fears that we cannot — and should not — ignore. But it seems to me that these legitimate concerns are items that the federal family has failed miserably to address.

Participants in this debate have little or no information on the economic impact of the various options for salmon and steelhead recovery. We have only piecemeal, partial data from the government regarding the economic benefits of the increased recreation and tourism dollars that salmon recovery would bring. We have no options on the table — no ideas from the government — for keeping the people of this region whole should the dams come down, or if other, more painful options for salmon recovery are finally chosen.

It's all well and good for Mr. Will Stelle and his bosses in Washington, DC to say that this issue needs to be resolved in the region. Granted, we must accept much of the burden here. But Idaho Rivers United also believes that since the federal government ~~helped~~ led us into this mess, they have a responsibility to help lead us out — before the salmon go extinct.

In closing, an overwhelming majority of scientists believe that saving Snake River salmon and steelhead can best be achieved by removing the four lower Snake dams. And the members of Idaho Rivers United believe that as we save the fish that saved Lewis and Clark, we must also do everything in our power for the people of Lewiston and Clarkston.

Let's accept the science and take down the dams. But at the same time let's get on quickly with the business of improving transportation systems in this region, irrigation systems downstream and building economic development efforts for those who will be most affected by our efforts to correct a past mistake.

Thank you,


Bill Sedivy
Executive Director